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SUBJECT: CODEL WEXLER'S JULY 2 MEETING WITH FM KOUCHNER
FOCUSSES ON ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN TALKS, LEBANON AND
HIZBALLAH, KOSOVO, AND TURKEY/EU

REF: PARIS 2787

Classified By: Ambassador Craig Stapleton for reasons 1.4 (B & D).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: In a July 2 meeting with Congressman Wexler, FM Kouchner said that the current disarray in the Palestinian Authority presented an historic opportunity for an initiative on the peace process, but he described Israeli "inertia" -- mainly PM Olmert's weakness -- as the main obstacle. The key would be to find a practical way forward with Israeli support, perhaps through Barak. Kouchner viewed Syria rather than Hizballah as the primary bad actor in Lebanon and argued against designating Hizballah a terrorist organization in order to have an interlocutor. He defended his own initiative for a Lebanon national reconciliation conference in France while acknowledging that Hizballah and other Shia representatives would probably boycott it in the end. Kouchner restated French determination to recognize Kosovo's independence while noting the difficulty of obtaining a common EU approach to this "European problem." Kouchner expressed open disagreement with Sarkozy's exclusion of eventual Turkish EU membership and urged the USG to be frank with Sarkozy about the dangers of Turkish alienation, but he also defended the EU's need to determine its borders in order to become a more cohesive political entity. (Septel reports Wexler's meeting with Sarkozy Diplomatic Advisor Jean-David Levitte.) END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) Congressman Wexler (D-FL), accompanied by the Ambassador, met July 2 with FM Bernard Kouchner to discuss Darfur, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Lebanon (with a particular focus on Hezbollah), Kosovo, and Turkey/EU. Kouchner was joined by cabinet advisor Alice Guitton, Americas Director (AS-equivalent) Daniel Parfait, Americas desk officer Sameh Safty, and Deputy Spokesperson Brieuc Pont. (Minister-Delegate for European Affairs Jean-Pierre Jouyet was originally scheduled to attend the meeting, but he departed with President Sarkozy for Strasbourg.)

U.S.-French Relations

¶3. (C) Wexler assured Kouchner of Washington's strong interest in the Sarkozy government and expressed the hope that change in tone would also be productive in terms of results. Kouchner responded that time would tell, while noting that the U.S. and France were already cooperating closely on Darfur, Lebanon, and the Middle East.

----- Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

¶4. (C) Kouchner stressed the importance of restarting the peace process, while criticizing the "inertia" of the Israelis, notwithstanding the Israeli decision to distribute tax monies to Mahmoud Abbas. He blamed Olmert for focusing only on domestic politics; according to Abu Mazen, Olmert was insisting that all contacts with the Palestinians go through him, as a way of buttressing his authority. Wexler encouraged France to work with the U.S. to restart the process, saying that leadership by the U.S., with France by its side, could make a real difference given Olmert's inability to do much on his own. Kouchner did not disagree, but stressed the need to find a practical way forward, saying little would be possible without Israeli support. He hoped that Ehud Barak could play a positive role. He expressed his intention to publish an article in the U.S. and French press on what he called an "historic opportunity" -- at a time when the Palestinians were weak and Palestinian terrorists in Lebanon were under siege.

¶5. (C) Wexler queried whether France was potentially interested in an international summit with the participation of the U.S., European and Arab countries that might serve as a vehicle for a concerted push toward a final settlement, suggesting that more European pressure on the USG might produce higher-profile U.S. engagement. He noted the less-than-positive result of Saudi mediation of the national unity government (NUG), which was not supported by the United States. Kouchner was dubious that the USG would be prepared to engage in this manner, but suggested he might be interested in hosting a conference in Paris to get the ball

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rolling. He said it was time for a new initiative, one that went beyond the release of prisoners and would appeal to Israelis and Palestinians alike fed up with war. The Fatah-Hamas split offered a perfect opportunity.

Hizballah/Iran -----

¶6. (C) Noting reports that a Hizballah operative was being held in Iraq, Wexler stated that Iran was clearly stirring the pot there and cited the detention as proof of the connection between Iran and Hizballah. He asked whether the incident would change European attitudes toward listing Hizballah as a terrorist organization. Kouchner rejected putting Hizballah on the terrorism list, since doing so was a "trap." He noted the catch-22 of not being able to talk to those with whom one needed to negotiate; political access was essential. Moreover, he argued, Syria, not Hizballah, was responsible for the recent violence in the Palestinian camps, and dialogue among all the communities was the only possible means for avoiding a civil war in Lebanon. Hizballah represented the Shia part of the Lebanese community.

¶7. (C) Kouchner reviewed his proposal for a national reconciliation dialogue on French soil, stating that the idea was to get all sides to begin talking to each other about their views toward each other and the future of Lebanon. There would be no documents, since recently the attempt in Lausanne to produce even an extremely weak statement had failed. Dialogue was not a "magic solution," but it was important "not to refuse to talk to the main protagonists even if one condemned their actions." It was not a powerful step, but the only one at their disposal for the time being.

¶8. (C) Kouchner insisted that the proposal did not represent a change in French policy: France supported the March 14 movement and the Siniora government, and intended to continue working closely together with the USG. He concluded that his expectations were low that representatives from all communities would be willing to attend in the end. Wexler

asked if that meant Hizballah. Kouchner said he suspected Hizballah would not come in the end, and that other Shia representatives would refuse as well, although he said later that the conference still had a 50-50 chance of taking place.

Claiming that all parties had been on board until the recent assassination of the parliamentarian Walid Eido, he announced that he would call PM Siniora later that morning to obtain an update.

Kosovo

¶9. (C) Saying he had been briefed by EUR A/S Fried on the Kosovo situation (reftel), Wexler asked about next steps. Kouchner responded that this was a European and not a U.S. problem, while assuring Wexler that France supported the Ahtisaari plan (even if he had moved too quickly) and independence for Kosovo. It was important to avoid a Russian veto and to achieve EU unity on a strategy -- both of which were proving problematic. Recognizing Kosovo following a Russian veto would undermine the UN system. It was useful to extend talks until the end of the year in order to bolster the election chances of the democratic parties in Serbia. In the end, however, independence would be inevitable, as stated by President Sarkozy. Guittot noted the imminent circulation of a new draft UNSC Resolution designed to ensure a continued international presence. Kouchner reiterated that it would be necessary "to play theater" for another six months, at the end of which a determination would need to be made on the feasibility of yet another resolution (although he seemed to doubt it would be possible). He stressed the importance of language stressing "the future" of Kosovo and not using the word "independence." He hoped the other EU member states would accept this solution.

¶10. (C) Wexler asked how this strategy furthered the chances of democrats in Serbia. Kouchner did not have a good answer (and appeared to concede that he did not fully understand Serbian thinking on this issue), but said he would travel to the region July 12 and 13 to try to massage them. He said the Serbs needed others to make the final decision so that they could move on and turn their attention to joining the

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EU. He complained that EU-Serbian relations had been frozen too long over Serbian failure to turn over war criminals to the ICTY. Now that SAA negotiations had resumed, it would be possible to offer more political incentives. He concluded again that this was a European problem.

Turkey

¶11. (C) Asked about Turkey, Kouchner made clear that he did not agree with Sarkozy's policy of excluding Turkey from EU membership. He claimed he was trying to convince Sarkozy to change his position, noting that future memberships would be subject to popular referendum in any case and that the accession negotiations would take at least 15 years. That said, he noted that Sarkozy had agreed that 30 of 35 chapters could be opened up in Turkey's ongoing accession negotiations with the EU. Wexler asked if there was anything the USG should do. Kouchner responded that the USG should be frank in making its own views known, by arguing the danger inherent in allowing Turkey to drift toward extremism, its secular tradition, and its good relations with Israel. He argued indirectly that the USG should also pressure Turkey on reforms and on recognizing the Armenian genocide.

¶12. (C) Kouchner nonetheless argued that Sarkozy was right in calling for an EU brainstorming session by the end of the year that would focus on European frontiers and identity and deal with the questions of Ukraine, Turkey, and the Mediterranean Union. Wexler noted the potential negative implications of putting an early end to many countries' membership aspirations. Kouchner said he understood, but he

defended Europe's long-term goal of becoming a cohesive political entity; the EU at 27 was already proving difficult, and the EU was losing energy. He said it was also necessary for the EU to deal with unwanted immigration in a context of high unemployment. While the game was not over for Turkey, Sarkozy was determined.

Darfur

¶13. (C) Kouchner judged that the June 25 ministerial meeting on Darfur had been constructive, but he admitted that the Sudanese had already veered from an initial statement in support of the conference's decisions to one more sharply critical.

¶14. (U) Representative Wexler did not have an opportunity to clear this message.

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